Clatsop County Historical Society Quarterly

CUMTUX

Vol. 41, No. 1 — Winter 2021

Image courtesy of Martha's son, Jay Naggiar

Martha Lovell Dahl with her late husband Bill Dahl. ca. 2015

We are sad to report the passing of Martha Lovell Dahl back in October 2020. For twenty years she was a consistent face and presence, serving as the Business Manager of the Clatsop County Historical Society. Through changes in board members and executive directors, construction, new offices, expansions and growth, Martha was a familiar voice of institutional and community history. Capable and organized, she was praised by auditors for her ability to quickly locate and produce anything required.

For twenty years, Martha was the one who answered your telephone calls and letters, scheduled and trained both staff and volunteers, and greeted you when you came into the museums to visit us. She seemed to know everyone in Astoria and their family history (and where they bought their cars!). Martha was proud of the role the Lovell family played in Astoria's history. She is missed by all of us connected with CCHS.

Clatsop County Historical Society
714 Exchange St.
P.O. Box 88
Astoria, Oregon 97103-0088
(503) 325-2203
cchs@astoriamuseums.org
www.astoriamuseums.org

Heritage Museum
16th and Exchange St., Astoria

Flavel House Museum
8th and Duane St., Astoria

Oregon Film Museum
7th and Duane St., Astoria

Uppertown Firefighters Museum
30th and Marine Drive, Astoria

Board of Directors

Luke Colvin, Astoria, OR
President

David Reid, Astoria, OR
Vice-President

Kent Easom, Coeur d'Alene, ID
Secretary

Kent Ivanoff, Astoria, OR
Treasurer

Jim Aalberg, Warrenton, OR
Andrew Bornstein, Bellingham, WA
Brett Estes, Astoria, OR
Craig Hoppes, Astoria, OR
Julie Kovatch, Astoria, OR
Patricia Roberts, Gearhart, OR
Randy Stemper, Astoria, OR
Dulcye Taylor, Astoria, OR

Staff

McAndrew Burns
Executive Director

Sam Rascoe
Director of Marketing

Liisa Penner
Archivist & Cumtux Editor

Chelsea Vaughn
Curator

Emily Rivera
Business Manager

Matt Powers
Facilities Manager

Carol Lambert
Sheila Nolan
Susan Swanby
Michael Wentworth
Cumtux Support

CUMTUX

Clatsop County Historical Society
Quarterly
Vol. 41, No. 1 — Winter 2021
Copyright © 2021 Clatsop County Historical Society
(ISSN 1083-9216)

Contents

2 **Catching the Last Ferry**
by Jim Aalberg

29 **History of the Japanese in Westport, Oregon**
by Ron Shiozaki

33 **He Was Driven Away, But Wesley Stuck With Pacific**
by Mike Francis

37 **Bend in the River**
by Samuel A. Soter

44 **Fort Stevens Firebug**
by Melvin L. Bashore

Front Cover:
The ferryboat *Almar*. ca. 1960
Image courtesy of Jim Aalberg

CUMTUX: Chinook jargon:
"To know...to inform"

CCHS Image # 10494.050

Puget Island under water during the Columbia River flood, June 1943.

In This Issue . . .

Jim Aalberg's research skills were applied to unraveling the Westport to Cathlamet river ferries' complicated history, the main story in this issue.

Jim also forwarded a story by Ron Shiozaki, a former resident of Westport, about the largest Japanese community in Clatsop County. Ron's mention of a relative and one of the most notable residents of the area, Newton Westley (originally "Uyesugi"), led to a story about the first licensed Japanese-American optometrist in Oregon.

B y chance, a cousin of my cousin, a former Brownsmead resident, Dr. Hannu Laukkanen, is an Associate Graduate Faculty Member and Professor Emeritus of Optometry at Pacific University. I asked him if he knew of Dr. Newton Westley. He did and forwarded a story by Mike Francis for the Fall 2020 issue of *Pacific*, the magazine of Pacific University, which we are pleased to have permission to reprint here. Dr. Hannu Laukkanen is also a well-known Columbia River snag diver whose story was printed in the Fall 2003 issue of *Cumtux*.

Samuel Nick Soter grew up in a Greek community in Clifton. He wrote about his memories of the area in the Winter 2004 issue of *Cumtux*. This time, we are printing his story about the history of the north-eastern part of Clatsop County, "Bend in the River."

The western part of the county is represented by a story written by Melvin L. Bashore, "Fort Stevens' Firebug."

—The Editor

Catching the Last Ferry
The Cathlamet-Puget Island-Westport Connection

by Jim Aalberg

Long before the first commercial ferry pushed off into the Columbia River, a connection between Cathlamet, Washington, and Westport, Oregon, was forged in the early 1850s by two pioneering Scotsmen: John West and James Birnie.

John West arrived at the spot on the Columbia River that would be named for him "Westport" in 1850. He built and operated a sawmill and salmon cannery, which would help establish his still-thriving town.

Even earlier, James Birnie, a retired Hudson Bay Company man, had settled in Cathlamet in 1846, where he operated a small trading post that purchased its inventory directly from his former employer. He referred to the area as "Bernie's Retreat," which would eventually include an Oregon Territorial Post Office established on August 8, 1851, with Birnie appointed the first Postmaster.

West had to travel by boat to Cathlamet for supplies and mail before the Westport post office was established on September 23, 1863, when West was appointed as Postmaster.

In 1878, West purchased from Birnie's widow, Charlotte, the land that comprised the Bernie's original Cathlamet Donation Land Claim. The West family played a significant role in the growth and development of Cathlamet in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Westport Lumber Company mill supplied the electrical power for Cathlamet via a sub-marine electrical power cable laid on the floor of the Columbia River.

More than 170 years later, the connection between Cathlamet, Puget Island, and Westport survives via the longest continuously operating ferry on the Columbia River and is the only ferry currently crossing the Columbia River between Oregon and Washington.

Early Ferry Service on the Lower Columbia

In 1920, Captain Fritz Elfving formed the Astoria-McGowan Ferry Company starting with a scow (barge) pushed by a tug that could carry nine cars. On May 1, 1921, Elfving put the fifteen-car ferry *Tourist*, powered by two forty-five horsepower Fairbanks Diesel en-

Image courtesy of the author.

Private Ernest E. Thompson's "mug shot".

Milton G. Thompson, then living in Clinton, Iowa. On March 13, 1902, he enlisted in the Army in Clinton, Iowa, and posted to the Coast Artillery at Fort Stevens.

During his court-martial trial at Fort Stevens, one of Thompson's brothers spoke on his behalf. "He was born while his mother was a raving maniac confined in an insane asylum, where she died," the *Morning Oregonian* reported his brother said. This claim was patently false as his birth mother, Emeline Thompson, lived until 1927. This brother also told the court that his family always considered his brother to be insane but never capable of violence or of doing harm. The court considered the brother's testimony and looked further into his mental condition before sending their findings and recommendations to the War Department.

Taking a cue from his brother's testimony, Private Thompson started acting like he was crazy. "The officers believe that Thompson's insanity is largely feigned," reported the *Morning Astorian*, in an effort to escape punishment." On December 6, 1902, he was sentenced to twenty years in the United States Penitentiary in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He was taken under heavy guard by two sergeants and two privates to prison with his legs and arms shackled.

Letters, reports, notes, and mugshots in his case file while in custody at Leavenworth Prison are preserved in the National Archives at Kansas City. They detail his habits and minor offenses committed while imprisoned, mostly talking, laughing, and dodging work assignments.

In April 1903, he wrote a letter to the War Department asking for

clemency in his sentence. In that letter, he asked for sympathy and understanding, asserting that he was wrongly convicted on some counts. "I do not think I am a very bad man," he wrote. "My service in the United States Army was very good up to Nov. the 26th." That would have been the day that he was recaptured after escaping from the post guardhouse. He protested his innocence of setting the fires. "I am not guilty of the charges of the fires that was at the Post," he wrote. "I tried to tell what I knew, but it was no use. I could not make them believe anything at all, so I stood for it all." He wished he could see his aged parents before they died. "I have my dear old Mother and Father yet, but it will only be a short time until they will be laid away to rest." His father died in 1921 and his mother in 1927, both buried in Clinton, Iowa. In his prison admittance papers, it was recorded that his religion was Methodist. "I never miss to go to church on Sunday or any time I can go." He swore that he had no intention to get even with anyone. "I have no intention of getting any revenge if I have to stay my whole time." Needless to say, his request for clemency was denied.

In mid-October 1904, Private Thompson was admitted to the penitentiary hospital suffering from what the doctors called intestinal tuberculosis. Three weeks after his admission, surgeons operated, removing over two quarts of pus from his abdomen. His father learned of his poor health and wrote to the warden for an update. The warden told him that since the operation, he had been a patient in the Tubercular Hospital in prison. For several months, he had been discharging pus, and doctors expressed concern that he was "in constant danger of general tubercular infection."

The warden felt sorry for the young prisoner, writing to his father: "He is a young man yet, and if you could induce him to settle down and obey the laws and take care of himself, he might live a good long time and be useful."

On September 4, 1905, Ernest Thompson was released from Leavenworth into the custody of his father. He had only served three years of his sentence, but his health conditions were the deciding factor in his early release. I could not find anything further about him after his release to his father's care in my research.

Melvin L. Bashore lives in Hammond, Oregon. He worked for thirty-eight years as a librarian, historian, and curator of historic sites for the LDS Church before retiring in 2013.

CCHS IMAGE #790.025.026

Fort Stevens, 1906. From a panorama by Frank Woodfield.